

Family Treasures and Old Documents may be Salvageable

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. – As Amy Miller, Tennessee’s National Flood Insurance Program coordinator, was surveying the damage this week from the severe storms and flooding that occurred in Middle Tennessee on Aug. 21, she spotted a yellowing, slightly dog-eared report card in the dry mud on a street in Waverly. To her surprise, she found it dated all the way back to 1922. The card appeared to belong to an eighth grader whose improving marks for the year were still visible.

Not all family mementos, treasures, photos, heirlooms and books remain in such good condition after a disaster like the recent storms. For those who would like to salvage these kinds of treasured possessions, the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, co-sponsored by FEMA and the Smithsonian Institution, offer the following tips to those would like to try to salvage them.

- If an object is still wet, rinse it gently with clean water. If dry, remove silt and other foreign material with a soft brush or damp cloth.
- Air dry wet things indoors. Sunlight might be too intense. Keep humidity as low as possible to prevent mold accumulation.
- Don’t try to separate photos or negatives that are stuck together. Soak them in water for up to 48 hours until you can safely pull them apart. Hang them with clips or clothespins to dry.
- Put wet books in a sturdy covered plastic container, spine side down. Place the container in a freezer and keep it there for several weeks, even months. Then remove and let dry.
- With fabrics or textiles, remove mud and debris with gently flowing clean water or fine spray from a hose. Press out the excess water with your hand. Do not try to wring out the water. Allow to dry.
- Clean wooden objects like furniture with a damp sponge; blot and let dry slowly inside the house, not under the sun.
- Rinse metal objects with clear water and blot dry immediately with a clean, soft cloth. Fans or low-heat hairdryers will hasten drying rate.
- For broken pottery or ceramics, put all the pieces in an open container and mark what it is. Don’t try to glue the pieces back together until they are dry. And watch for mold.



If mold appears, spray the pieces with Mold-Ex or a similar product.

- Personal safety is important when working with objects retrieved from contaminated water. Wear disposable vinyl or nitrile gloves, protective clothing, goggles, and, when possible, use a respirator while working.

For more detailed information on salvaging water-damaged historical documents and personal possessions, visit this [FEMA Fact Sheet](#).

[Basic salvage guidelines are also available](#) from the Heritage Emergency National Task Force.

Another resource is the American Institute for Conservation which provides advice on the proper care and maintenance of family heirlooms as well as a search tool to find local conservation professionals who can help salvage photos, books, textiles, paintings, wooden furniture and other valuable objects (www.culturalheritage.org/membership/find-a-conservator).

For cultural institutions with flood-damaged facilities and/or collections, the [National Heritage Responders](#) composed of conservators, archivists, collections managers, and other professionals who are trained to provide free salvage guidance to cultural stewards. For more information, visit National Heritage Responders or call the 24/7 hotline: 202.661.8068

For more information on Tennessee's disaster recovery, visit www.tn.gov/tema.html and www.fema.gov/disaster/4609. You may also follow FEMA on www.facebook.com/fema and Twitter [@FEMARegion4](https://twitter.com/FEMARegion4).

